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2. ARABS MOVE TO REPAIR SYRIAN PIPELINE AND BEGIN SUEZ DISCUSSIONS

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There are indications that Nasr, now that Israel is in process of withdrawal, feels it necessary to make some conciliatory gestures to relieve expected pressures on Egypt from the West. Press reports state that Syria has given permission for repair of the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC) pipelines sabotaged last November, and a UN source in Cairo reports Nasr has instructed his foreign minister to proceed to discuss a settlement of the Suez Canal issue.

These moves do not indicate any basic change in the Egyptian position on these issues. If Israel delays its withdrawal, or Egypt feels it is not obtaining its aims in the Gaza strip or the Gulf of Aqaba, action on these moves may be abandoned.

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Nasr told the UN source that clearance of the tug Edgar Bonnet--the principal remaining obstacle to transit of ships up to 10,000 tons or up to 25-foot draft--could begin as soon as the Israelis gave "concrete evidence" of withdrawing. The US naval attaché in Cairo estimated that three weeks' work after beginning the removal of the Bonnet would be required to complete this first phase of clearance.

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3. PETSARATH EXPECTS PREMIERSHIP AFTER RETURN TO LAOS

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Prince Petsarath expects to become Laotian prime minister after supplementary elections are held in May,

Both Prime Minister Souvanna

Phouma and Pathet chief Souphannouvong have agreed in principle to this. They expect their half brother to play a unifying role in the settlement of the Pathet Lao problem following his return in late March.

Comment

Petsarath is planning to return to Vientiane about 22

March after 11 years of self-exile in Thailand. Negotiations between the government and the Pathet Lao are deadlocked. If a settlement is reached following his return, his great prestige as a Laotian nationalist would seem to fit him to preside over a coalition government as a symbol of national unity.

He would provide strong leadership for Laos.

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**4. COMMUNISTS STRENGTHEN MILITARY CAPABILITIES
IN NORTH SUMATRA**

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The pro-Communist regimental commander at Siantar, in North Sumatra, Lt. Col. Machmour, has split with the area's territorial commander, Lt. Col.

Ginting, Machmour has set up a village defense organization throughout the rubber-rich area along the east coast of Sumatra. The organization is Communist dominated and numbers between 12,000 and 15,000, of whom approximately 1,500 are armed.

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Comment

Machmour has been arming members of the Communist-dominated estate workers' union, SARBUPRI, ever since the North Sumatran revolt of last December. His village security organization has enrolled all village youths in the area, and military training has been carried on under the direction of the local SARBUPRI chief.

Machmour appears to be working with the Communists to defeat an autonomous movement in the east coast area and to undermine the strongly anti-Communist and largely autonomous Central Sumatran regime.

The army chief of staff, General Nasution, who has been equivocal on President Sukarno's concept for a reorganized government, is now reported in "serious disagreement" with the president over Communist participation in the government.